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SUBJECT: AMNESTY LEAVES FATE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS UNKNOWN

REF: MINSK 562

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Amnesty Bill Appears to Exclude Political Prisoners

11. (U) On October 24, the lower house of parliament passed both readings of a bill granting amnesty to over 3,000 common criminals. To enter into force the bill must still pass the upper house and be signed by Lukashenko. At this point the amnesty does not cover political prisoners. Prison authorities have cited all convicted political prisoners except Andrey Klimov for alleged severe violations of prison rules, making them ineligible. Klimov does not meet the bill's requirements because he has not yet served one-third of his sentence.

Naumov Does Not Rule Out Amnesty for Political Opponents

12. (U) Minister of Internal Affairs Vladimir Naumov told reporters "there are no political sections in our criminal code, therefore there are no political prisoners. ... If (convicted members of the opposition) meet the conditions of the amnesty, the law will apply to them."

Comment: Lukashenko to West: Is That Your Final Offer?

13. (C) On October 23, former Presidential Administration Aide Aleksandr Feduta told Pol Chief that Lukashenko's Soviet mentality meant the dictator genuinely did not draw a distinction between political prisoners and common criminals. He believed the GOB drew out the decision on amnesty (reftel) because Lukashenko hoped to receive a concrete offer from the West in return for freeing members of the opposition. Naumov's non-answer suggests the regime might still entertain the idea of setting political prisoners free if the price was right, but confirms that the regime fails to understand our basic demand for a good-faith opening to reform.
STEWART